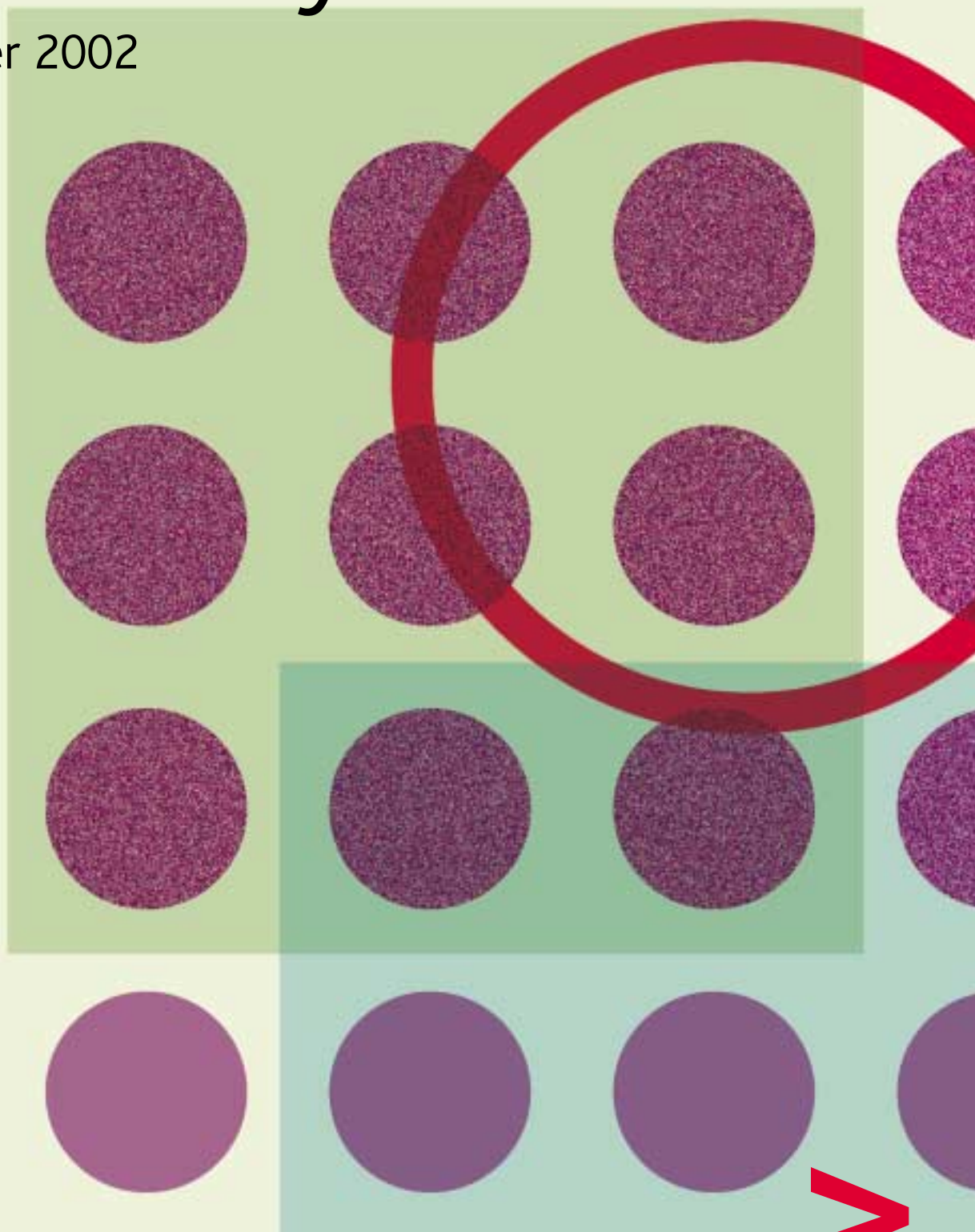


Learning and Skills Council Bedfordshire and Luton

# Area Survey

October 2002



**Learning+Skills Council**  
Bedfordshire and Luton

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## Introduction

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Bedfordshire and Luton was launched in April 2001. It was established to raise the skills and knowledge of adults and young people. Its ultimate aim is to improve business competitiveness and personal prosperity by championing the power of learning.

It is one of 47 local arms of an organisation that has a national budget of around £6 billion and responsibility for financially supporting around five million learners each year.

The LSC Bedfordshire and Luton provides funds for post-16 education and learning opportunities and associated activities through further education sector institutions; school sixth forms; adult and community learning colleges; information, advice and guidance for adults networks; education business link organisations; work-based learning providers; and a workforce development/ Investors in People contractor. It also has a flexible budget, the Local Initiative Fund, which enables it to fund development projects. It is also an ESF co-financing organisation.

It needs to ensure that it is in a position to effectively plan education and learning provision that meets the needs of individuals, communities, employers and the economy in general. Therefore an area survey of the post-16 education and learning provision that the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton funds was conducted.

The area survey covered post-16 education and learning provision in general and was supplemented by two studies, which focused on provision for learners from minority ethnic groups and for people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities.

It also investigated 10 elements of provision that are generally covered by OfSTED inspections. The key headings were: access and participation; learner achievement and progression; curriculum and programmes; teaching and learning; support and guidance; management, collaboration and liaison; strategy and planning; cost effectiveness and value for money; learner needs; and employer needs.

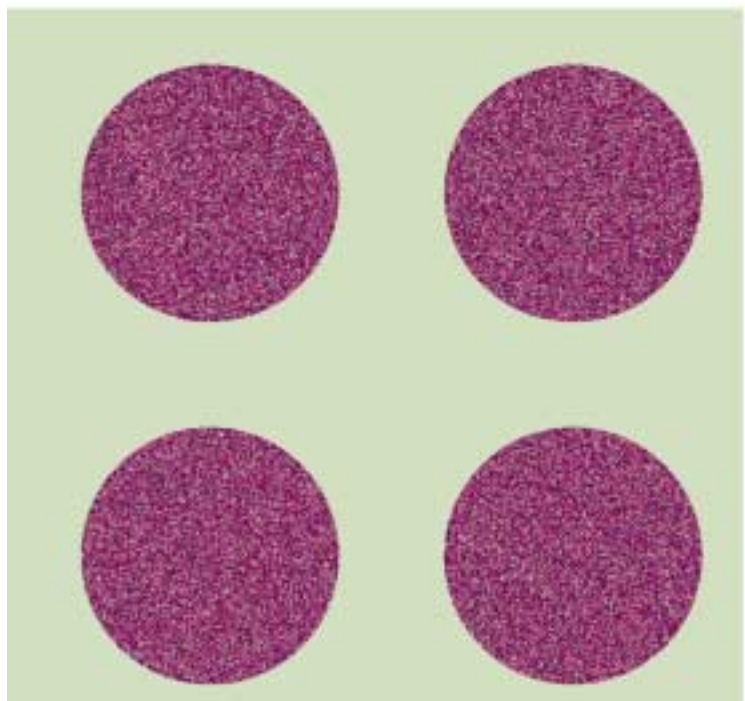
The area survey was directed by a steering group comprising key stakeholders and decision-makers.



# Objectives

The key objectives of the area survey were to:

- Identify the strengths and areas for development of post-16 education and learning provision in Bedfordshire and Luton
- Inform the planning processes of the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton, Bedfordshire Local Education Authority, Luton Local Education Authority and learning community partners
- Identify actions to improve any areas highlighted for development
- Assist the policy objectives of raising participation and achievement of all young people and adults
- Create improved working relationships between all learning partners
- Anticipate issues that might arise from the planned OfSTED inspection envisaged for 16 to 19 learning provision in Luton
- Compare findings with best practice found elsewhere
- Identify lessons that Bedfordshire and Luton might be able to learn from.



## Strengths

The survey identified a number of areas of strength in the current education and learning provision in the area.

### Wide range of provision

There is a wide range of post-16 education and learning provision in the area funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton. The 18 local education authority-funded school sixth forms (17 in Bedfordshire and 1 in Luton), four independent secondary school sixth forms, four further education sector institutions, 8 LEA maintained Adult and Community Learning (ACL) institutions and 21 work-based learning providers deliver this provision.

Approximately 4,700 pupils attend the area's 18 LEA-maintained school sixth forms; about 1,200 pupils attend the four independent school sixth forms; 43,500 students attend the four further education sector institutions.

In 2001 to 2002, there were approximately 2,100 trainee starts in work-based learning with 25 providers. Of these starts, 1,223 were on Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, 621 were on Advanced Modern Apprenticeships and 250 were on NVQ programmes. About 75 per cent of these 2,100 trainees were aged between 16 and 19-years-old.

Most LEA-maintained school sixth forms offer over 20 subjects at GCE A/AS level and offer between 3 and 5 vocational courses at intermediate and advanced level. Bedford College and Luton Sixth Form College also offer a wide choice of GCE A/AS subjects.

At GCE A/AS and at intermediate and advanced vocational levels pupils and students in the area are well provided for, but for those wishing to study at foundation level, the choice is limited.

There are 15,900 16 to 19-year-olds in education or learning in the Bedfordshire and Luton area. Half of these are in further education sector institutions, 37 per cent are in school sixth forms and 13 per cent are with work-based learning providers.





## Strengths (continued)

## Size profile of Bedfordshire's school sixth forms

In Bedfordshire there is a large number of school sixth forms offering a number of places and a wide range of learning and qualification opportunities.

Luton has one 11 to 18-year-old co-educational school, Cardinal Newman Roman Catholic School, that has a sixth form of over 200 pupils. Luton also has a sixth form college.

Bedfordshire has a middle school system in which sixth form education is provided by seventeen 13 to 18-year-old, comprehensive, mixed schools.

Unlike the rest of the country Bedfordshire has a significant proportion of its sixth forms (64 per cent) with over 200 pupils. The comparable figure for the country is 40 per cent. However, Bedfordshire has an 18 per cent tail of school sixth forms with 150 pupils or less. Sixth forms of fewer than 200 pupils may find it more difficult to deliver an acceptable range of Curriculum 2000 opportunities for their pupils.

From 1 April 2002, responsibility for funding school sixth forms passed to the LSC.

Table 1 shows the size of school sixth form provision at September 2001.

**Table 1**

Bedfordshire and Luton school sixth forms: The number of pupils at September 2001.

School	Number of pupils
<b>Bedfordshire LEA</b>	
Biddenham Upper School	115
The Cedars Upper School	394
Harlington Upper School	288
Hastingsbury Upper School	199
John Bunyan Upper School	94
Manshead Upper School	231
Mark Rutherford Upper School	278
Queensbury Upper School	328
Redborne Upper School	409
St Thomas More Catholic School	175
Northfields Upper School	133
Samuel Whitbread Community College	305
Sandy Upper School	156
Sharnbrook Upper School	564
Stratton Upper School	210
Vandyke Upper School	261
Wootton Upper School	346
<b>Bedfordshire total</b>	<b>4486</b>
<b>Luton LEA</b>	
Cardinal Newman Catholic School	219
<b>Luton total</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4705</b>

Source: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton

## Strengths (continued)

### Focused further education sector institutions

In line with patterns in further education sector institutions across England, there has been an emphasis on providing courses to NVQ level 3 and below. The LSC Bedfordshire and Luton funds four further education sector institutions. These are:

- Barnfield College
- Bedford College
- Dunstable College
- Luton Sixth Form College.

The four further education sector institutions are the principal providers of post-16 further education in the area. For 2001 to 2002 they received funds of about £37 million from the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton. This represents about 80 per cent of their total annual income.

For 2000 to 2001, the four further education sector institutions recruited about 43,500 students (see Table 2). 8,000 of these were full-time; 9,300 were 16 to 19-years-old; and 14 per cent were not funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton. Thirty two per cent of enrolments were at NVQ level 1 and below, 24 per cent were at NVQ level 2, 21 per cent were at NVQ level 3 and 1 per cent was at NVQ level 4 and above (see Table 2). This pattern of provision is similar to that found in further education sector institutions across England.

The programme areas that attract the highest recruitment levels are health and community care, humanities, sciences, business and basic skills. Over one quarter of the enrolments is from non-white minority ethnic groups.



## Strengths (continued)

**Table 2**

Bedfordshire and Luton further education sector institutions: Students on LSC-funded provision by qualification level and type for 2000 to 2001.

Level	Qualification	Age of student						Not known	Total
		16 to 18	19 to 20	21 to 24	25 to 29	60 +	Under 16		
1 and Entry	GNVQ	122	7	8	24	0	0	1	162
	NVQ	143	23	17	128	2	4	5	322
	Other	534	386	826	9502	1356	62	671	13337
2	GCSE	178	59	88	453	18	13	32	841
	GNVQ Precursor	184	7	9	16	0	0	0	216
	GNVQ	547	8	1	1	0	3	0	560
	NVQ	607	152	198	909	12	6	7	1891
	Other	1038	332	552	4388	387	23	196	6916
3	A/AS level	1477	85	87	370	47	3	16	2085
	GNVQ Precursor	1031	221	76	163	3	2	3	1499
	GNVQ	642	59	10	22	0	0	0	733
	NVQ	103	55	83	581	3	0	12	837
	Access to HE	0	10	47	126	1	0	0	184
	Other	505	188	246	2500	86	3	92	3620
4,5 and HE	NVQ	0	7	22	187	2	0	2	220
	HNC/HND	1	9	4	21	1	0	0	36
	Other	27	6	41	196	11	0	6	287
Other	OCN	100	125	226	1428	289	4	141	2313
	Additional	2	2	6	0	0	0	0	10
	NVQ/GNVQ	213	310	758	5175	374	12	628	7470
<b>Total</b>		<b>7454</b>	<b>2051</b>	<b>3305</b>	<b>26190</b>	<b>2592</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>1812</b>	<b>43539</b>

Sources: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton and LSC national office



## Strengths (continued)

### Collaborative working

It is important that there is collaboration to avoid unnecessary duplication of provision. The LSC Bedfordshire and Luton is providing strong leadership in this area to try to ensure productive working relationships with the local education authorities and the area's providers.

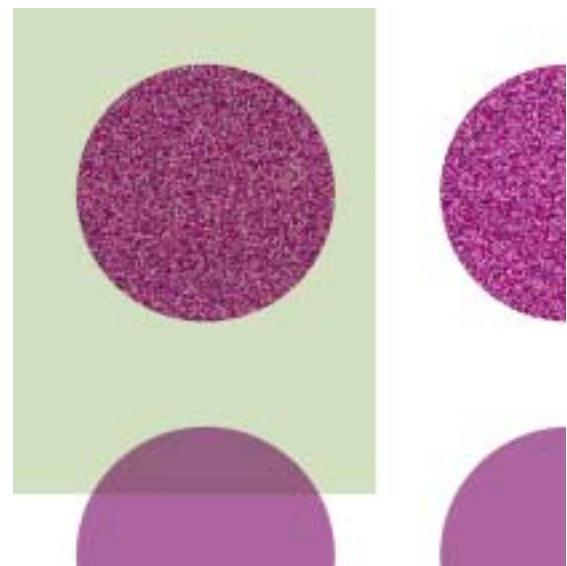
Overall the survey showed that while schools, colleges and private providers plan their post-16 provision independently, there are cordial relationships between them.

The main providers of higher education in the area are the University of Luton, Cranfield University, the University of Hertfordshire, University College Northampton and De Montfort University, which has campuses at Bedford and Milton Keynes. The Open University is also based nearby at Milton Keynes.

One example of good collaboration is an initiative by The Bedfordshire and Luton Federation for Further and Higher Education (BFHE). The BFHE, comprises Barnfield College, Bedford College, Dunstable College, Luton Sixth Form College and the University of Luton.

The BFHE is working with schools to encourage more students into higher education. It will:

- Undertake systematic programme planning, based on demand and employment trends
- Seek to avoid wasteful competition
- Formulate a new post-16 modular credit/ credit accumulation and transfer scheme
- Converge ICT systems and facilitate a marked increase in distance-supported, work-based learning
- Create a website
- Create defined higher education venues at each of the further education sector institutions and a number of outreach sites conveniently located for local businesses
- Work in partnership with local schools and employers.



## Strengths (continued)

## Generally good inspection reports

The Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED), in collaboration with the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), is now required to lead area-wide inspections of 14 to 19 education and learning, encompassing all providers. So far neither Bedfordshire or Luton have undergone an inspection.

In the past, the further education sector institutions were inspected by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and emerged with credit compared to the national averages. In the curriculum areas the

grades awarded to the institutions were around the national average (see Table 3).

However, in cross-college aspects of provision the Bedfordshire and Luton institutions perform above the national averages, with 25 per cent of the areas inspected attracting a grade one compared with a national average of just 9 per cent.

**Table 3**

Bedfordshire and Luton further education sector institutions: Summary of inspection grades awarded following Further Education Funding Council inspections.

Area inspected	Bedfordshire and Luton: average grade (%)	England: average grade (%)
Curriculum area		
Grade 1	10	6
Grade 2	48	44
Grade 3	33	44
Grade 4	5	7
Grade 5	4	0
Cross college		
Grade 1	25	9
Grade 2	40	45
Grade 3	25	38
Grade 4	10	8
Grade 5	-	0

Source: FEFC inspection reports

## Strengths (continued)

The average grades awarded to the Bedfordshire and Luton work-based learning providers are compared with national average grades in Table 4. In occupational and generic

areas the training providers funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton perform at or above national average levels.

**Table 4**

### Bedfordshire and Luton work-based learning providers: Summary of latest inspection grades

Inspection grade	Occupational areas			Generic areas		
	England	Beds and Luton		England	Beds and Luton	
		Local providers	All providers		Local providers	All providers
Outstanding	4	4	4	1	6	8
Good	30	22	35	13	25	39
Satisfactory	45	55	53	39	61	39
Less than satisfactory	20	15	7	37	8	14
Poor	2	4	1	10	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Sources: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton; Training Standards Council; and the Adult Learning Inspectorate

## Relationships between schools and colleges

It was clear that head teachers of the Bedfordshire upper schools and the Luton high schools are keen to pursue the Government's emerging post-14 agenda and that they are keen to encourage school-college links in connection with vocational GCSEs and other vocational options that might benefit their pupils.

## Attractiveness to learners from outside the area

Postcode analyses of student residences provide some interesting insights into the attractiveness of Bedfordshire and Luton as an area to study. The residences of students attending the further education sector

institutions funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton are shown in Table 5.

Further education sector institutions, funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton, recruit 12,000 of their 56,000 students from outside the Bedfordshire and Luton area. About 7,000 Bedfordshire and Luton residents attend further education programmes at institutions outside the Bedfordshire and Luton area. The area is a net importer of students and this factor should be taken into account when planning future provision (see Table 6). These student flows are important in relation to the strategic planning of provision since the numbers involved dwarf demographic changes that are often used to predict student demand.

## Strengths (continued)

**Table 5**Further education sector institutions funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton:  
Residence of learners 2000 to 2001

Residence of learners	Total	%
<b>Bedfordshire and Luton</b>	<b>44331</b>	<b>78.1</b>
Bedford	17582	31
Mid Bedfordshire	8463	15
South Bedfordshire	6571	12
Luton	11715	21
<b>From outside Bedfordshire and Luton</b>	<b>12297</b>	<b>22</b>
Cambridgeshire	586	1.0
Suffolk	88	0.2
Hertfordshire	3819	6.8
Essex	147	0.3
London North	525	0.9
London West	325	0.6
London Central	82	0.1
London East	172	0.3
London South	52	0.1
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	2643	4.7
Berkshire	54	0.1
Northamptonshire	639	1.1
Black Country	56	0.1
Other	697	1.2
Unknown	2412	4.3
<b>All learners</b>	<b>56628</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton

**Table 6**Net flow of students to further education sector institutions in neighbouring LSC  
areas for 2000 to 2001

LSC area	Out flow	In flow	Net flow
Cambridgeshire	294	586	+292
Hertfordshire	1897	3819	+1922
Northamptonshire	640	639	-1
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	1026	2643	+1617
<b>Total</b>	<b>3857</b>	<b>7687</b>	<b>+3830</b>

Source: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton

## Strengths (continued)

### Increasing participation of learners from minority ethnic groups

More than 20 per cent of the area's higher education participants are from minority ethnic groups compared with 13 per cent of the national student population. The study into provision for learners from minority ethnic groups found that Bedfordshire and Luton's local education authorities are both fully committed to learning inclusion for minority ethnic groups. Bedfordshire has developed a consultation document on its Policy for Learning Inclusion and Luton has an ethnic minority achievement strategy team.

The latest OfSTED inspections of the local education authorities found that support for minority ethnic pupils, including travellers, was 'a major strength showing real promise' (Luton) and that 'the authority's approach to social inclusion is now satisfactory' (Bedfordshire).

It also found that both local education authorities are encouraging schools to celebrate diversity and implementing a wide range of initiatives to broaden the curriculum.

Both local education authorities are working together to provide advisers from the different communities. There has been a strong focus on working with African Caribbean and Bangladeshi pupils. The Bangladeshi adviser has also been working with the Pakistani/Kashmiri community because there is no adviser targeting that group.

### Knowledge of disability issues

The study concerning the provision for learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities found that although there is some support for learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities, there is limited understanding of disability as an equality or inclusion issue. There was also some awareness among providers of the Disability Discrimination Act but not necessarily a full understanding of its implications.



## Action areas

The survey highlighted several areas where action is needed.

### Low GCSE performance of pupils from Luton schools

For 2001, the GCSE performance of young people in Bedfordshire is just below the national average of 49 per cent obtaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C. The national average is 50 per cent. In Luton, only 38 per cent of young people obtained five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C at the end of key stage 4.

There are wide variations in performance between schools across Bedfordshire and Luton. The best performing schools achieve over 60 per cent. However, some achieve less than 25 per cent. Young people from Bedfordshire and Luton continue this below average performance in the GCE A/AS and ACVE examinations. The Bedfordshire and Luton local averages of 17 and 13.9 points respectively are both below the national 2001 average of 17.4 points.

**Table 7**

Bedfordshire and Luton area: Performance of pupils from LEA-maintained schools and students from further education sector institutions in the GCSE and GCE/ GNVQ examinations in 2001

Achievement	Bedfordshire %	Luton %	England %
<b>GCSE</b>			
5 A*-C	49	38	50
5 A*-G	90	90	89
Average points	40.1	35.6	39
Number of passes	4.7	4.4	5.5
<b>GCE/NVQ</b>			
Average points per student	17.0	13.9	17.4
Average points per entry	5.2	5.5	5.5

Source: DfES School and College Performance Tables for 2001

See also Appendix 1 for the full list of performance.



## Action areas (continued)

## Underachievement of particular groups from key stage 3 onwards

There are varying patterns of underachievement for minority ethnic groups. Generally, Pakistani pupils underachieve at all key stages whereas African Caribbean pupils tend to start out by over achieving but underachieve from key stage 3 onwards.

Pakistani pupils achieve below the local education authority average in all key stages, Bangladeshi pupils at key stages 1, 2 and 3 and Black Caribbean pupils at key stage 3 and key stage 4.

Boys underachieve relative to girls in all ethnic groups, but particularly among pupils of white, Pakistani and Black Caribbean heritage at key stage 3 and key stage 4. Girls underachieve in key stage 1, which goes against the national trend. Overall, Black Caribbean girls are over achieving but the lower achievement by boys brings down the figures for the whole cohort.

Black Caribbean boys enter the education system with relatively high aspirations and perform well until year-9 when they move to middle school and the level of achievement declines.

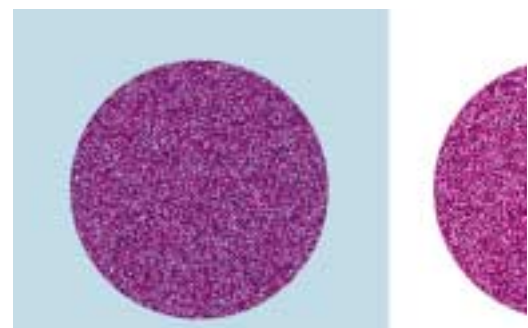
Bedfordshire and Luton's local education authorities are seeking to address the underachievement of these groups through their Education Development Plans. In both local education authorities, actions are undertaken in line with national priorities that seek to narrow the achievement gap and tackle underachievement. There is however some concern that the central focus on attainment, which is reinforced by league tables can be at the expense of achievement by particular groups and individuals.

## Participation rates at 17-years-old

The number of pupils participating in education after 17-years-old in Bedfordshire and Luton varies according to the type of institution they study at. The maintained school sector is less successful at retaining 17-year-olds in education than the further education sector. The maintained school sector accounted for 26 per cent of 17-year-olds in 1999 to 2000 despite accounting for 33 per cent of 16-year-olds in the previous year.

The further education sector institutions funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton perform at just below the national average level in relation to student retention in the further education sector. But the higher achievement levels more than compensate for this.

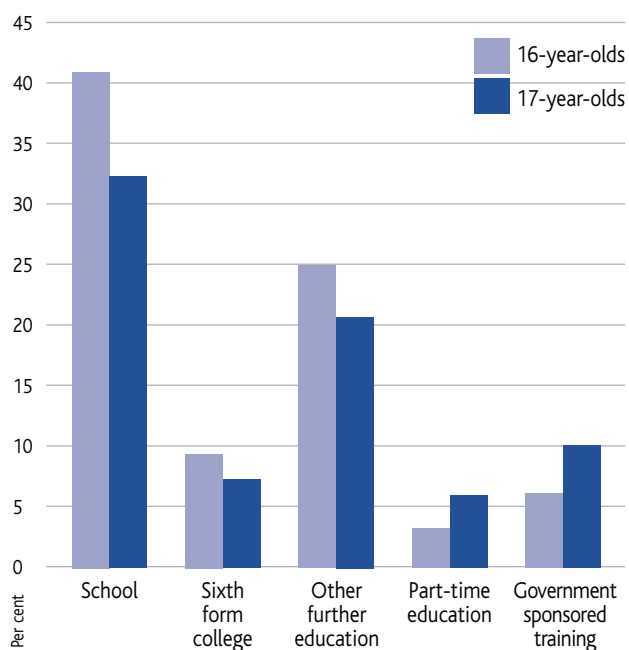
The participation levels of 16 and 17-year-olds in education and learning in Bedfordshire and Luton and in England in 1999 to 2000 are shown in Figures 1 and 2.



## Action areas (continued)

Figure 1

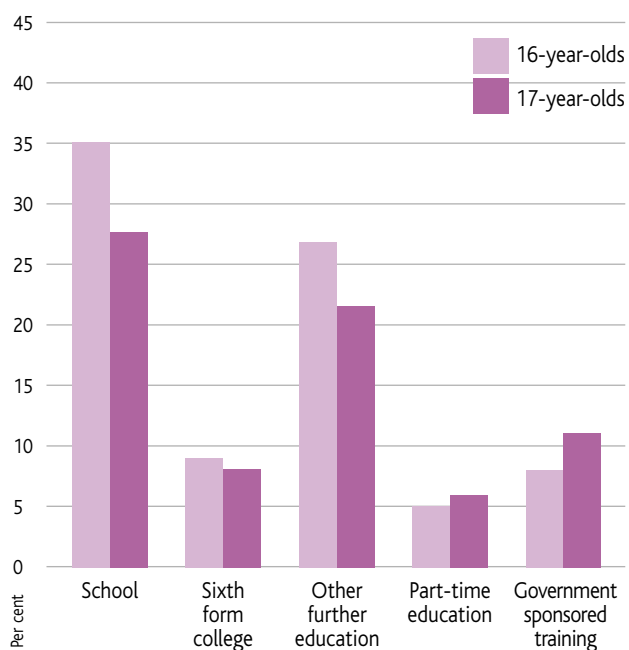
**Bedfordshire and Luton:**  
Participation of 16 and 17-year-olds in education and learning for 1999 to 2000.



Source: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton

Figure 2

**England:**  
Participation of 16 and 17-year-olds in education and learning for 1999 to 2000.



Source: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton

Table 8

**Bedfordshire and Luton:**  
Participation of 16 and 17-year-olds by nature of institution for 1999 to 2000.

	16-year-olds %	17-year-olds %
Maintained schools	33	26
Independent schools	6	6
Sixth form college	9	7
Further education college	25	21
Part-time education	3	5
Government sponsored training	6	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>73</b>

Source: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton

## Action areas (continued)

### Organisation and delivery of adult and community learning

In Bedfordshire, adult education is delivered through community colleges based in schools that are grouped into three consortia: north, mid and south Bedfordshire. The local education authority devolves funding to each consortium on the basis of population. One or more adult education manager organises the work of each consortium. These managers are responsible to community colleges' headteachers and the consortia executive committees. The local education authority's head of lifelong learning oversees the work of the adult education service.

An OfSTED report on the Bedfordshire Adult Education Service in 2000 pointed out that improvements in leadership and management are required to assure the service's quality and to more effectively influence and steer what it provides and supports. Despite this, OfSTED concluded that much of the provision inspected was of good quality although the service provided was not comprehensive and many groups in the population did not participate.

The report also said that adult and community education and learning is very poorly funded in Bedfordshire. The net local authority expenditure per head of adult population in 1998 to 1999 was £1.35, increased to £5.93 by external funding. The gross budget in 1998 to 1999 was £1.67 million, of which the local authority contributed £381,000. In 2000 to 2001, 4.5 per cent of the adult population participated in adult education, but few students from minority ethnic groups participate in the service.

In response to the OfSTED report, and within the new funding infrastructure provided through the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton, Bedfordshire local education authority has appointed a head of adult community learning to address the fundamental issues surrounding this area of work.

### Work-based learning provision

For 2001 to 2002 there were 26 providers of work-based learning contracted to the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton (see Table 9) and there were approximately 2,100 trainee starts in work-based learning. Of these trainee starts, 1,223 were on Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, 621 were on Advanced Modern Apprenticeships and 250 were on NVQ programmes. About 75 per cent of the trainees were aged 16 to 19-years-old.

Just over 10 per cent of the providers contracted to the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton have contracts of over £500,000 per annum (see table 9). However, 60 per cent have contracts of under £250,000 per annum.



## Action areas (continued)

**Table 9**

Profile of work-based learning providers funded by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton by size of contract for the financial year ending 31 March 2002.

Size of contract (£)	Number of providers
1 - 100,000	12
101,000 - 250,000	4
251,000 - 500,000	7
501,000 - 1 million	3
Over 1 million	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

Source: LSC Bedfordshire and Luton

Inspections of work-based learning providers generally found that the providers were performing at or above the national average. However research and interviews conducted with the Connexions/ Careers Service raised a number of issues. These include:

- The limited number of work-based learning opportunities
- The difficulty in obtaining work-based learning places
- The employer culture, particularly in Luton, that tends to place a low value on both educational achievement and work-based learning
- The negative attitudes among young people and their parents to work-based learning
- The fact that only a quarter of work-based learners achieve the full Modern Apprenticeship framework.

Work-based learning providers were also interviewed as part of the research and suggested several areas that could be looked at. Some of the specific action points include:

- The need for more productive working relationships with schools and colleges
- The need for a more collaborative approach from all providers
- The need for support from the LSC and others in the establishment of quality assurance systems and frameworks
- The need for some capital input from the LSC
- The need to improve initial assessment of trainees.

Among minority ethnic groups only 20 per cent of young people successfully complete their Modern Apprenticeship framework and achieve the targeted qualifications. And the percentage of learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities achieving the framework is also low at just 22 per cent.

## Action areas (continued)

### Careers guidance given to young people

School sixth forms, further education sector institutions and work-based learning providers value the support that they receive from the Connexions/ Careers Service, but most regard this as insufficient to meet their needs. They were also critical of the policy of targeting students with the greatest needs, to the detriment of all other students. Further education sector institutions, work-based learning providers and employers expressed concern about the advice given to year-11 school leavers. This was particularly in relation to vocational and work-based learning opportunities that do not appear to be effectively promoted by careers advisers in the area.

### Retention and achievement for minority ethnic groups

The Minority Ethnic Group Task Force has identified a number of issues of concern, which are perceived as barriers for learners from minority ethnic groups in learning access, participation and achievement. The issues are:

- Lack of recognition of the needs of minority ethnic groups by learning institutions
- Continued non-participation as a result of initial exclusion from school of particular groups such as young black males
- Barriers to participation such as language, confidence, recognition and accreditation of overseas qualifications
- Lack of vision by parents of the benefits of learning and their inability to provide appropriate guidance and/ or signposting;
- The perception of being continuously researched with no related outcomes.
- The prevalence of social and cultural factors, which devalue the importance of learning, such as unemployment, low-income, drug-abuse, single parenthood.

The following action areas have been identified:

- Collecting, analysing and delivering data on the performance and participation of learners from minority ethnic groups in order to develop effective inclusion strategies and plans
- Monitoring informal exclusion to ensure that it does not replace formal exclusion as a means of meeting targets for reduction
- Identifying contingency funding to cope with unpredictable influxes of learners such as refugees.



## Action areas (continued)

## Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities

The study of learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities highlighted that while there is a great deal of support in terms of enthusiasm and a willingness to act, this support has not always been joined up. The study found that learners were not always aware of what is available and often felt alone in having to find out where to access it. Providers also seem willing to offer support for learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities but did not all have a disability policy.

Action points that could improve the knowledge concerning learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities include:

- The LSC Bedfordshire and Luton raising its profile not only with providers, but more widely
- Collecting more effective data on learner needs to provide effective planning of provision. To this end the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton could facilitate cross-agency meetings to agree data needs
- Mapping access and the disability support provided to enable disabled people and people with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities to access all providers and their courses.
- Providing a single stream of information on learning in Bedfordshire and Luton that encourages people to learn. This needs to be accessed in a range of ways including via the Internet, as written material, from computer-based access points and in a range of alternative formats.

## Meeting the needs of employers and learners

There is a need to improve the linkage between local labour market needs and the curriculum offer. Although there is a range of labour market information available, there is little evidence of its use in the planning, development and delivery of LSC-funded provision.

There is also little evidence that providers plan their post-16 learning provision in consultation or collaboration with employers. The LSC Bedfordshire and Luton will carry out a survey of employers' needs to encourage more employer involvement in the planning and delivery of education and learning at all levels.

There is also no forum to engage local employers on issues concerning learners with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities. There is still a prevalence of a special needs approach to disability rather than an equality approach. The LSC Bedfordshire and Luton may facilitate an Employers' Network similar to the one established in Milton Keynes. This could be beneficial in providing a discussion forum to meet the needs of employers, providers and employees.



## Consultation with key stakeholders

As part of the survey of all post-16 education and learning provision and its funding by the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton, it was important to canvass as many relevant views as possible from a wide range of stakeholders.

Not surprisingly different stakeholders had their own different agendas and expectations from the area survey.

There were several areas of overlap in the views expressed by stakeholders such as funding issues, improving achievement, the need for more collaboration between learners and providers, vocational and work-based learning issues and the availability of information.

The main topics and issues discussed came under the following headings:

- Management information
- Curriculum matters
- Information, advice and guidance
- Widening participation
- Underachievement
- Learning targets
- Partnership and collaboration
- Access to learning
- Resources
- Quality issues
- Expectations of the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton.



### Consultation with key stakeholders (continued)

The following section sets out the views expressed by each stakeholder.

## Local education authorities

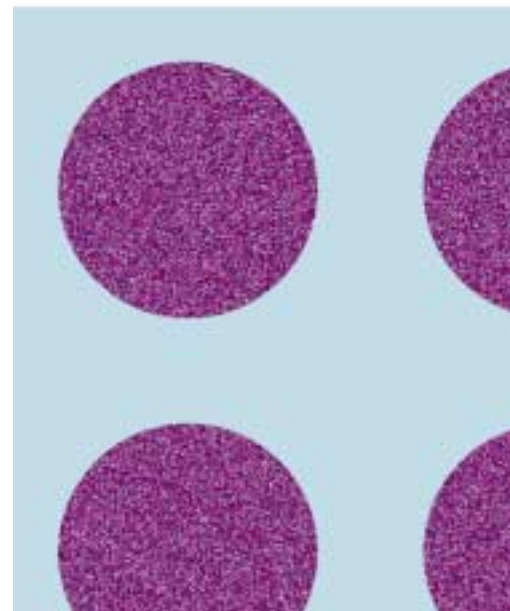
The broad opinion from the local education authorities is that the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton needs to develop a long-term, fully inclusive education and learning strategy for the area. This should embrace all needs. More specifically the local education authorities want measures to raise the aspirations, education and skills levels of the population via the delivery of flexible and high-quality education and learning programmes.

It was also felt that opportunities for adult learning should be expanded and that more use could be made of e-communication and e-learning.

Other issues included:

- the relatively low staying-on rates in higher education of Bedfordshire and Luton residents
- the need to encourage collaboration between schools and between schools and colleges
- lack of a strategic approach to post-16 education in Bedfordshire
- lack of coherence across providers of adult education
- concerns about the quality of careers advice
- the need for more collaboration between colleges and special schools
- the high capital costs associated with expanding school sixth forms

- the poor transport infrastructure and the difficulties that this and the high cost of transport poses for learners, particularly in rural areas
- school-college-private provider relations in a competitive funding and recruitment market.



## Consultation with key stakeholders (continued)

## Head teachers of local schools

Discussions were held with the head teachers of Bedfordshire upper schools and Luton high schools who are keen to pursue the Government's emerging post-14 agenda and want to encourage school-college links in connection with vocational GCSEs and other vocational options that would benefit pupils. The teachers recognised the challenge offered by the introduction of a vocational element in the pre-16 curriculum. And they accepted that there was a need to improve performance in GCSE examinations.

Other issues included:

- Social deprivation and its educational implications in some Luton communities
- Insular attitudes engendering a lack of confidence in pupils outside their own town environment
- The low proportion of parents with higher education qualifications
- Transport difficulties that hindered institutional choice for those learners without access to private transport.

## Principals and staff of further education sector institutions

All four further education sector institutions were visited in the area and all recognised the need to respond to challenging government agendas involving raising standards, establishing centres of vocational excellence and the emerging 14 to 19 policy.

They accepted that more guidance was needed for year-11 leavers to ensure that they were fully informed about the range of education and learning opportunities available to them. And they also accepted the need to work with schools and private providers in the design and delivery of vocational GCSEs. But they added that both the Government and the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton should recognise that there are costs associated with collaboration.

Other issues included:

- concern about the new inspection arrangements and overload stemming from the involvement of so many players in the quality assurance field (ALI, OfSTED, the LSC and the Employment Service)
- the need to respond to the educational needs of asylum seekers and refugees
- the need for a level playing field in the funding of post-16 education
- the challenge of meeting the poorly articulated demands of small and medium-sized enterprises
- the need to collaborate with the adult and community education services to avoid duplication of provision
- the complexity and time-consuming nature of the present audit regime.

## Consultation with key stakeholders (continued)

### Work-based learning providers

Interviews with work-based learning providers were on the whole critical. There was a general criticism of administrative procedures, the inspection and audit procedures, reluctant learners and associated costs, and a lack of collaboration between providers and learning institutions.

The main issues included:

- low levels of recruitment to work-based learning that are not helped by providers being prevented from recruiting directly and are hindered also by the administrative approach to recruitment by the Careers/ Connexions Service
- uncertainty about funding levels, the number of funding streams and the potential re-introduction of Individual Learning Accounts
- the twin burdens of audit and inspection
- the high costs associated with dealing with reluctant learners who are not recognised in the funding arrangements
- coping with the outcomes of inspection
- the need for more productive working relationships with schools and colleges
- a wish to be consulted about the 14 to 19 Green Paper
- the need for a more collaborative approach among all providers
- the difficulties posed by the Modern Apprenticeship framework and low framework completion rates
- the need for more realistic achievement levels for learners, many of whom have a long school history of underachievement
- the need for support from the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton and others in the establishment of quality assurance systems and frameworks, particularly for small providers
- the need to up-skill care staff in the light of impending legislation
- the lack of adequately trained staff in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector
- the fact that labour market data does not sufficiently inform provision
- the need for some capital input from the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton for work-based learning providers
- the difficulty of obtaining placements for young people on Modern Apprenticeship programmes
- the need to improve the initial assessment of trainees
- the quality of the guidance given to school leavers
- the absence of a level playing field particularly in relation to capital grants, the Standards Fund and the Centres of Vocational Excellence initiative
- the small size of some of the private training providers that often prevents them from developing the infrastructure to adequately meet modern expectations in relation to quality assurance, equal opportunities, trainee support and the management of training
- the inflexibility of the testing arrangements for key skills
- the inadequacy of the trainee allowance
- the need to reduce bureaucracy and to simplify the funding arrangements
- the need for more collaborative working between private providers and between private providers and colleges, particularly in relation to Centres of Vocational Excellence-type initiatives.

## Consultation with key stakeholders (continued)

### Connexions/ Careers Service

One of the most important strategic roles of the Connexions/ Careers Service is to provide reliable destination data on year-11 and year-13 school leavers and young people leaving the further education sector or work-based learning. Connexions Bedfordshire and Luton said that it experienced conflicting demand from providers and their learners. One important problem was that a small number of learners facing particular difficulties often takes up a high proportion of advisers' time.

The key objectives of the Connexions/ Careers Services, as they see it, are to:

- raise the aspirations, participation and achievement levels of all young people by providing impartial information, guidance, advice and other support according to their needs
- provide all young people outside learning with the support they need to fulfill their potential
- provide an integrated support service for young people to assist them to engage effectively in learning and employment
- influence and improve learning provision and other services for all young people
- develop the capacity of the Connexions Service and its key partners to deliver the above objectives.

Other issues included:

- the inappropriate choices made by young people that were often exacerbated by schools wishing to retain pupils in their own sixth forms
- the impact on choice of living in a rural area (transport, access, poverty, low aspiration, choice and availability of learning opportunities, low pay)

- the lack of higher education provision in Bedfordshire and Luton
- the limited range of occupations available
- the high proportion of 'statemented' young people
- the lack of NVQ level 1 provision
- the limited range of work-based learning opportunities
- the difficulty in obtaining work-based learning places
- the employer culture, particularly in Luton, that tends to place a low value on both educational achievement and workforce development
- the negative attitudes among young people and their parents to work-based learning
- parental aspirations which may lead young people to ignore professional advice and follow inappropriate programmes of study
- the need to improve education and learning provision for young people who struggle to attain NVQ level 2 qualifications
- the need to identify and make more use of the contributions to student guidance and choice that might be made by providers and other partners
- the need to improve and extend destination tracking to include further education sector and work-based learning leavers
- the need to develop a Bedfordshire and Luton-wide management information system that provides easily available and user-friendly data about learners and providers that is shared widely
- the need to work more closely with the Youth Service and other local authority services.

## Consultation with key stakeholders (continued)

**Partners** (including Luton Borough Council's Social Services department, Bedfordshire County Council's Youth Service, the Bedfordshire and Luton Learning Partnership, the Bedfordshire and Luton Adult and Community Education Service and the vice chancellor of the University of Luton)

There is awareness by partners and stakeholders of the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton's strategic plan for 2002 to 2005 and its action areas. However, some of the operational and delivery changes necessary to implement the strategic plans have not yet been fully addressed and will need to be in collaboration with partners.

Other issues included:

- the low aspirations of the population
- the high cost of housing in relation to earnings
- the difficulty of graduate recruitment experienced by businesses in the area
- the lack of numeracy, literacy and language skills among the economically active population
- the lack of interest of many small and medium-sized enterprises in training their own workers or recruiting graduates to help them run their businesses
- the lack of commitment among employers to work-based learning for young people
- the need for employers to adopt more family friendly policies such as maternity leave, part-time work for mothers and flexible working hours to help meet the labour shortfall
- the need for a more coherent transport policy across Bedfordshire and Luton that would extend travel to work distances, help employers' recruitment and extend work opportunities for employees
- the relatively low participation rates of Bedfordshire and Luton residents in higher education
- the importance of the area's location in the so-called Oxford-Cambridge arc and the opportunities that this provides for re-positioning the Bedfordshire and Luton economies with a new high technologies base
- the need for appropriate support from the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton for small and medium-sized enterprises
- the need to monitor and evaluate regeneration projects
- the need to meet the educational needs of asylum seekers, particularly those with young children.





## Consultation with key stakeholders (continued)

### Employers

Employers in the area are interested in the aptitudes and qualities that provide a foundation for the development of job-specific skills. Employers say that they require the following employability skills in young people aged 16 to 18-years-old: personal presentation, interview, verbal and written communication, willingness to learn, timekeeping, reliability and respect for authority.

Many employers feel that Modern Apprenticeships and NVQ programmes attract young people who are not A level or university material. Some employers are also still negative about the business benefits of employing people from minority ethnic groups.



## The way forward

The next stage is to discuss the findings with stakeholders and agree any actions. A conference will be held on Wednesday 30 October to discuss themes highlighted in the area survey.

The proposed themes are a demand-led approach, reform and collaboration or competition.

An executive summary of the area survey can be downloaded from the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton's web site [www.lsc.gov.uk/bedsandluton](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/bedsandluton). After the conference, the LSC Bedfordshire and Luton will issue a conference report to all delegates.



# Appendix 1

Bedfordshire and Luton: Performance of pupils and students from LEA-maintained schools, independent schools and further education sector institutions in GCSE and A level examinations in 2001.

Institution	GCSE		A/AS/AGNVQ	
	5 A*-C	Average point score per entry	Average point score	Average point score per entry
<b>Luton LEA</b>				
Ashcroft High School	34	36.5	16.5	6.2
Cardinal Newman Catholic School	47	37.7		
Challney High School for Boys	41	40.8		
Challney High School for Girls	33	35.1		
Denbigh High School	49	40.5		
Halyard High School	21	25.6		
Icknield High School	51	40.5		
Lea Manor High School	24	31.5		
Lealands High School	28	26.1		
Putteridge High School	45	39.9		
Rabia Girls School	50	26.3		
South Luton High School	31	30.3		
Stopsley High School	50	41.2		
<b>Bedfordshire LEA</b>				
Biddenham Upper School	31	33.1	13.6	4.1
The Cedars Upper school	61	46.9	17.8	5.9
Harlington Upper School	62	48.3	19.4	5.6
Hastingsbury Upper School	40	38.4	10.8	3.1
John Bunyan Upper School	21	24.0	11.1	3.9
Manshead Upper School	45	39.7	21.0	5.4
Mark Rutherford Upper School	52	38.7	17.3	5.0
Northfields Upper School	27	27.1	12.8	3.3
Pilgrim Christian School	100	43.4		
Queensbury Upper School	58	41.4	18.1	5.3
Redborne Upper School	63	46.1	18.2	5.0
Rushmoor School	74	39.4		
St Andrews School	73	46.3		
St Thomas More Catholic School	38	36.8	15.3	5.2
Samuel Whitbread Community College	52	44.4	18.7	5.4
Sandy Upper School	43	37.1	18.2	5.4
Sharnbrook Upper School	68	48.1	20.5	5.8
Stratton Upper School	48	40.9	13.6	4.9
Vandyke Upper School	44	39.0	13.7	5.0
Wootton Upper School	60	46.6	20.3	5.6

## Appendix 1 (continued)

Institution	GCSE		A/AS/AGNVQ	
	5 A*-C	Average point score per entry	Average point score	Average point score per entry
<b>Independent schools</b>				
Bedford High School	90	61.0	24.9	7.8
Bedford Modern School	93	59.0	23.0	6.9
Bedford School	93	59.1	25.3	7.7
Dame Alice Harpur School	98	60.4	24.6	7.2
<b>Further education sector institutions</b>				
Barnfield College			9.4	4.7
Bedford College			10.1	3.6
Dunstable College			8.1	3.8
Luton Sixth Form College			13.9	4.9
<b>Bedfordshire Average</b>	<b>49.2</b>	<b>40.1</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Luton Average</b>	<b>38.2</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>5.0</b>
<b>England Average</b>	<b>50.0</b>	<b>39.3</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>5.5</b>

Source: DfES School and College Performance Tables for 2001